

Georgetown Street Furniture  
Various Locations  
Washington (Georgetown)  
District of Columbia

HABS No. DC-252

HABS  
DC  
GEO  
120-

PHOTOGRAPHS  
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey  
Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation  
National Park Service  
Department of the Interior  
Washington, D.C. 20240

## GEORGETOWN STREET FURNITURE

HABS  
DC  
GEO  
120-

Location: Georgetown, Washington, D.C. All the items included are located above--or on--M Street, N.W., with the majority in the northeastern part of Georgetown.

Statement of Significance: The pavings, sidewalks, carriage blocks, lamp posts, streetcar rails, etc., described below contribute considerably to the attractiveness of Georgetown and are themselves either vestiges of the 19th century, or early 20th-century efforts at uniform good design in street furniture.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

## A. Streetcar rails at O and Potomac Streets:

The streetcar tracks still visible at the intersection of O and Potomac Streets were part of the Metropolitan Railroad, which was authorized in the fifth section of the Act of February 26, 1895 (28 Stat., 683) as follows:

That the said Metropolitan Railroad Company is hereby authorized and required to lay down and continue its underground electric construction of single track from the intersection of P and Thirty-fifth Streets northwest, thence running west along P Street to Thirty-sixth Street, thence south on Thirty-sixth Street to Prospect Avenue, thence east on Prospect Avenue to Thirty-fifth Street, thence north on Thirty-fifth Street to O Street, thence east continuing its route as now located.

The Metropolitan Railroad Company was acquired by the Washington and Great Falls Electric Railroad Company on February 4, 1902, and became part of the Washington Railway and Electric Company System. (Tindall, pp. 37-39.)

## B. Streetcar Rails on M Street:

Tracks were first laid on M Street when the Washington and Georgetown Railroad Company was chartered by an Act of Congress on May 17, 1862. The east-west line of the Company began at Wisconsin and M Streets and followed M to Pennsylvania Avenue as far as 15th Street, then continued to the Capitol and ran as far as the Navy Yard gate. (Tindall, p. 27)

The first cars used by this company were small and unheated with seats on the sides. Originally they were drawn by two horses but were replaced by a "one horse" car in 1865. Then in 1877, 1879, and 1883 the Washington and Georgetown Railroad Company returned to the two-horse car; the one-horse car was then prohibited after January 1, 1893 by an Act of Congress. (Tindall, p. 57)

The fare charged by the Washington and Georgetown Railroad Company was never more than five cents within the boundaries of Washington and Georgetown.

(More complete information on public transportation in Georgetown will be found in Tindall's article.)

C. Source of Information:

Tindall, William. "Beginnings of Street Railways in the National Capital." Records of the Columbia Historical Society. Vol. XXI. Washington, D.C.: 1918, pp. 27-57.

Prepared by Ellen J. Schwartz  
Architectural Historian  
Commission of Fine Arts  
September 1969

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

The following street features and items of street furniture give Georgetown much of its attractiveness. Some of the items such as the paving stones and streetcar tracks, the brick sidewalks, coal chute covers, and carriage blocks, are 19th century remnants which give an indication of what most of the streets and sidewalks must have looked like at one time. Other items, such as the traffic lights, call boxes, etc., are early 20th century features--also used in Washington proper--which show an effort to achieve attractive standard design.

Other related 19th century items are visible in several photographs in other data books. For example, a splash block was photographed at Bomford's Mill (DC-143). Nineteenth century cast-iron fences are also common in Georgetown, and details were included in the photographs of 1402 31st Street (DC-251) and 1534 28th Street (DC-246). The standard wrought-iron railing used on the C & O Canal is visible in the photograph

of about 1870 of Potomac Lodge No. 5 (DC-153). A rare iron bulkhead with stone enframing set in the sidewalk is visible in the photograph of 1072 Thomas Jefferson Street (DC-161). This bulkhead was removed in 1968.

B. Description:

1. Fire Department Call Box: southwest corner of 28th and O Streets, N.W.

This modern call box, placed in an opening in the U-shaped upper bracket, is supported on a columnar circular base on which a shield reading "Electrical/D.C./Dept." is attached to the south side. The text is enclosed in a palm wreath. At a height of 29" on the base is an acanthus band. The bracket which holds the fire box is also decorated with acanthus and is supported on a bulb of acanthus with a base formed by a wreath of bound bay leaves and berries. At the top of the bracket is a modern extension pipe 27" long with a light at the end. Old photographs show that this pipe replaces an extension which was taller, fluted, and terminated by a capital which supported a spherical globe. Below the bracket the lower portion (50") is painted gray; the bracket (25" tall) and fire box are painted red; the upper extension pipe is also gray. The total height of the unit is 8-1/2'. The base of the pillar is about 19' in diameter. Many coats of paint have made the features of the cast iron much less distinct.

2. Police Telephone: northwest corner of 28th and O Streets.

This fixture is similar to the fire department call box at the southwest corner and the bases of the two are often interchanged so that the police boxes sometimes have the circular base described above. This base, however, is composed of an octagonal pillar which supports a cushion-shaped member decorated with stylized egg and dart. A band of beading separates this from the stylized acanthus or palm decoration of the enframing for the call box (which itself is undecorated). This enframing has a finial which terminates in a bud. The pillar base and the finial are painted gray (though the lowest layer of paint appears to have been green); the call box is dark blue. On the front of the box is embossed "Police Telephone" and a plaque bearing the number 23. The pillar base is 14" across at the bottom. The height to the call box enframing is 59"; the height of the box plus the enframing is 22" and the height of the finial, 10". The total height is 7'-7".

Street lamp: northwest corner of 28th and O Streets.

Located next to the above call box is one of the standard District of Columbia street lights, designed in 1923 by Daniel Burnham. The circular base is decorated with an abbreviated egg and dart band, and the fluted shaft terminates in a stylized palm leaf capital. Just below the lamp globe is a projecting square attachment which now carries the street name on translucent plaques illuminated from behind by the street light. The base of the lamp is about 20" in diameter and the whole fixture about 13-1/2' tall. The lamp is painted gray.

3. Traffic light: southwest corner of 28th and P Streets.

The shaft is identical in design to the regular street light (described in No. 2) except for being larger in overall size and having no light globe. The base is 24" in diameter, and the shaft is about 15' tall including the stylized pineapple finial. The three traffic lights are mounted on the side and attached to the pole by two brackets. Another variation of this is a street light of this same size with a 24" base (thus larger than the street light described in No. 2); with the signal lights attached to the side by a bracket, just below the light globe. The traffic light pole has an electrical access hatch in the splayed base, held closed by a screw.

4. Street lamp: northeast corner of 30th and Olive Streets.

This is similar in size to the lamp described in No. 2. The first 19" of the shaft, however, has cabled fluting.

5. Brick Drive and Curb: south side of 2812 P Street.

This brick paved driveway, 9'-4" wide at the curb but tapering slightly toward the garage, is laid in common bond with the stretcher side upward. The bricks are set in earth only. The curbing here is quarry faced gray granite in blocks 6" wide. On either side of the drive the herringbone sidewalk (about 12' wide) continues east and west. The bricks lining the gutter of the asphalted street are set in mortar and appear quite new.

6. Brick Drive and Curb: east side of 31st Street between N Street and Dumbarton Avenue.

This brick paving is located in front of two carriage houses, although part of the brick--in front of the north door of the northern carriage house--has been replaced with concrete. The brick paving is the width of the sidewalk (about 12') extending to the grass border

next to the curb. This section is in a herringbone pattern with the stretcher sides up, except for a replacement patch in front of the small door between the two buildings. The brick strip next to the curb is 39" wide--the width of the grass strip along the sidewalk. Here the bricks are run parallel to the bluestone curb, stretcher face up, in common bond. The exposed bricks measure 2" x 8-1/4". The entire bricked section is about 36' long. The bluestone curb is laid in sections which range up to 5' long. (See HABS No. DC-250 for a discussion of the northern carriage house, and a photo showing the setting of the brick paving.)

7. Sandstone Carriage Block: 2811 Dumbarton Avenue, south side of street.

This dark red sandstone carriage block is located 11" from the bluestone curb and is oriented with the long side parallel to the street. The block measures 13" x 25-1/4" x 6-1/2" with the ends hammer faced but the top and long sides smooth. It is located on a herringbone sidewalk. A similar very plain carriage block is located at 3019 P Street, north side. The block measures 17" x 30" x 8", is of gray granite, and is of somewhat finer finish, with rounded corners and slightly beveled upper edges. It is set with the narrow end to the street and 6" from the curb.

8. Coal Chute Cover: east side of 31st Street north of M Street.

This cast-iron coal chute cover is 17-1/2" in diameter with a stylized leaf pattern in a 4-1/2" outer band. It is separated from an inner rosette by a band inscribed in raised letters "F. & A. Schneider". It is set in a bluestone surround which is 39" x 57" and is placed 5" from the granite curb. An identical cover is located at the southeast corner of 1400 29th Street (northwest corner of 29th and C Streets) although it is here cemented into a concrete enframingent 33" square. It is about 13' from the bluestone curb, and adjacent the south wall of the house.

9. Coal Chute Cover: 1335 30th Street, east side.

This cast-iron cover, 17" in diameter, is undecorated except for incised concentric bands. It is set in a bluestone block-measuring 36-1/2" x 42" which is flush against the projecting bay of the house. (The house was built about 1890.) The block is about 9' from the bluestone curb. The coping of the stairs which lead to the basement door of the same house is treated in similar manner to the curbing.

10. Perforated Coal Chute Cover: 3041 N Street, north side. This plain iron cover, 20-1/4" in diameter, is perforated with numerous round holes. The bluestone surround is 35-1/2" square and is located about 5' from the granite curb. The coal chute cover is about 15' from the west face of 3041 N Street at the western property line. Nearby is a standard D.C. water meter cover 12" in diameter.

11. Paving Blocks and Streetcar Rails: O Street at the intersection of Potomac Street.

O Street, from Wisconsin Avenue west to 35th Street, is paved with rectangular paving blocks which measure about 4-1/4" x 8-1/2", although some are as small as 2-1/2" x 3" or somewhat larger. They are light gray granite, now worn smooth or slightly rounded on the upper face, and are bedded in soil. They run north-south, across the width of the street, although next to the bluestone curbs the gutters are formed by two rows of paving blocks running east. The street is 30' wide and has a single set of streetcar rails down the center. These rails, with an electric track down the center, occupy a total width of 5'-1/2". At intervals of 12' along the central electric track are a pair of metal covers with an embossed checkerboard pattern. The larger cover is 19-1/2" x 22-1/4" and the smaller is 8-1/4" square, located on the opposite side of the central track. These alternate, i.e., the large cover is on the north and the small one on the south at one point; at the next point, they reverse locations. The rails are 5-1/4" wide and the electrical track 6". The space below the central track appears to be about 18" deep. At 35th Street and C Street, where the tracks now end, there are two removable metal plates about 4' long on either side of the opening. Each has two handles. Apparently the plates could be lifted to insert or retract the power shoe of the street car. The plates are decorated with a checkerboard casting.

12. Paving Stones: M and Bank Streets.

These square stones, about 3 to 3-1/2" on a side are arranged in fan-shaped arcs which measure about 4' across. The stones are of red or pink granite; the curbs, of gray granite. The double streetcar rails down the center of M Street are the same as those on O Street, except that the plates on both sides of the central electrical track are the same size (large) rather than one smaller than the other.

13. Cobblestones: 2819 Olive Street.

This stretch of cobblestones is directly in front of a two-door brick carriage house on the north side of Olive Street. (The carriage house has been converted to a garage below and apartments above.) The cobbled area is about 26' east-west x 15' north-south. A section about 6' square extends further east, next to the bluestone curb. A concrete framed manhole cover lies to the north.

Prepared by Daniel D. Reiff  
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August 1969

PART III. PROJECT INFORMATION

These records were made in 1969 during a project to record 14 structures and a group of 16 items of "street furniture" in the Georgetown section of Washington, D.C. The project was conducted by the Commission of Fine Arts with the cooperation of the Historic American Buildings Survey. The resulting documentation was donated to HABS by the Commission and published in 1970 in HABS Selections Number 10, Georgetown Architecture: Northwest Washington, District of Columbia.

The project was under the direction of Mr. Charles H. Atherton, Executive Secretary and Administrative Officer of the Commission of Fine Arts. The recording team was composed of Miss Ellen J. Schwartz and Mr. Daniel D. Reiff, Architectural Historians, and Mr. William P. Thompson, Architect. The photographs were made by photographers J. Alexander and Jack E. Boucher under contract to the Commission.